

Expressing Opinions

Teacher Preparation

Pam quickly came to realize that sixth graders are an opinionated lot! In addition, she understood that they learn best when physical movement is part of a lesson, for even brief periods of movement replenish needed oxygen supplies to the brain; therefore, she knew that combining movement with spoken language would increase learning.

Pam wanted to capitalize on her students' need for movement and the fact that they love to share their opinions, so she decided to set up an agree/disagree activity based on topics relevant to current school policies. To prepare, she asked her team to spend part of their planning period helping her generate a list of topics for the students, which she wrote on large sentence strips. For example:

- Schools should have dress codes.
- Students should be required to wear uniforms to school.
- The current lunchroom rules are fair.
- Schools should have police officers stationed in them for increased safety.
- Teenagers outside of the school's student body should be allowed to attend school dances.
- Students should be allowed to buy soft drinks for lunch.
- This school should allow two fifteen-minute breaks a day.

She then printed the word Agree on a colorful half-piece of poster board and the word Disagree on another. She taped them on opposite walls in her classroom to create two open areas in which students could stand. Finally, Pam thought through a few basic rules concerning movement and mentally rehearsed her lesson.

Activity Starter

First, Pam explained the activity and called for student support of the rules. She asked the students to stand beside their chairs and listen carefully to each printed statement that she was going to read (and post). She then read the first statement and directed students to go and stand under the appropriate Agree or Disagree sign, according to his or her opinion of the statement. When all students were in place under the two signs, she processed the first statement by asking selected students to explain the reasons for their positions. (Pam knew that this justification might sway some students to the other side, which was appropriate. When this happened, she invited the student to discuss why s/he was drawn to the other side, and then she allowed the student to actually move to stand under the opposite sign.)

Next, Pam repeated the procedure with a new opinion statement until all statements were discussed. She then extended the activity by asking students to brainstorm their own statements of opinion, and she allowed them to discuss the statements in self-selected groups of four.

Finally, she asked the students to choose any single opinion statement shared that day (from the posted strips) and write paragraphs explaining their positions. The students then closed the lesson by sharing their written opinions in their small groups.